

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Gibbons: Measure Benefiting Safe Rides Program Gains Final Legislative Approval



Bill Allows Volunteers Under 18 to Drive Between Midnight and 5 a.m.

The state Senate Tuesday gave final legislative approval to a bill (**Senate Bill 328**) that will exempt teenagers under 18 who are volunteers for the Greenwich Safe Rides program from a state law that prohibits them from driving between midnight and 5 a.m., said state Representative Lile R. Gibbons, who worked to get the provision inserted in the bill.

The legislation, which Representative Gibbons co-sponsored, passed the state House of Representatives on Monday (May 1, 2006).

“The intent of the law passed last year was to give recently-licensed teenage drivers additional experience behind the wheel before allowing them to drive after midnight,” Representative Gibbons said. “However, there are legitimate reasons for teen drivers under the age of 18 to drive between midnight and 5 a.m. – and those who are volunteer drivers for Safe Rides are a great example.”

“In addition to providing safe rides home for other teenagers, the volunteer drivers for Greenwich Safe Rides gain valuable experience that helps them develop leadership skills. If this exemption had not been added, the Greenwich program was in danger of being closed down or becoming less effective. Greenwich Safe Rides is an important program that saves lives,” Representative Gibbons said.

“The Greenwich Chapter of the American Red Cross sponsors the Greenwich Safe Rides program, which has been in operation for 25 years and is the largest program of its kind in the state. Safe Rides is a peer run safety organization that provides safe rides home for teens between 10 p.m. and 2:30 a.m. on weekends. High school students, working in teams of two, drive cars owned and insured by the American Red Cross. High school juniors provide most of the drivers – and they are under 18,” Representative Gibbons said.

“This bill exempts 16- and 17-year-olds assigned as drivers in a Safe Ride program sponsored by the American Red Cross, the Boy Scouts of America, or another national public service organization from the nighttime driving hour restrictions that apply to teen drivers, enabling Greenwich Safe Rides volunteers to drive between 10 p.m. and 2:30 a.m. I’m very pleased that we were able to get the exemption added to the law and keep this program going,” Representative Gibbons said.

“Under the law that was approved last year, 16- or 17-year-old licensed drivers are not allowed to drive from midnight to 5:00 a. m. unless they are traveling for employment, school, or religious activities; for medical necessity; or to respond to an emergency or as part of their duties as active members of a volunteer fire company or department, volunteer ambulance service or company, or

an emergency medical services organization. It was an oversight that we did not get Safe Rides drivers added to the list of exemptions included in last year's bill," Representative Gibbons said.